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ABSTRACT

This guide is the first in a series of eleven generated in 1978 as the result of workshops that focused on peer training, a different approach to teaching. By sharing summaries of group discussions, the authors of this booklet hope to encourage citizens to work cooperatively within their communities to solve problems. The booklet also is intended as a tool to present this role group's perspective to other role groups and to serve as a discussion guide for interaction and training. Some of the topics explored include benefits derived from citizen participation, problems encountered by community education programs, the role of citizens on councils, and the training of citizens. Discussed in depth are suggestions for developing a working relationship between citizens and the following role groups: school board members, superintendents, principals, community education coordinators, community college personnel, government agency representatives, parks and recreation personnel, and extension agents. (Author/LD)

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CITIZENS AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Role Guide Series #1

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Citizens and Community Education

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CONTENTS

	Page
Preface	5
As Citizens, We Believe	6
Introduction	8
Benefits/Problems	10
The Role of Citizens on Councils	13
Characteristics of Citizens on Councils	14
Responsibility of Citizens on Councils	15
Relationships to Other Role Groups	16
School Board Members	17
Superintendent	19
The Principal	20
System-wide Community Education Coordinator	21
The Building-Level Community Education Coordinator	22
Community College Personnel	23
Government/Agency Representatives	25
Park and Recreation Personnel	26
Cooperative Extension Agents	26
Special Populations	27
Training	29
The Future	30
Bibliography	32

PREFACE

This booklet is a result of two three-day Role Training and Peer Interaction Academies which were held in 1978 and funded by a training grant from the U.S. Office of Education, Community Education Program. The format for both Academies was designed to focus upon peer training, a method which has proven to be a useful teaching and information sharing approach. The sessions provided the opportunity for members of eleven identified role groups to work together with peers to examine in-depth:

a) the relationship between their specific role group and community education, and

b) the ways in which they could stimulate their peers to improve role performance and effectiveness.

Material development phases were interwoven with both structured and unstructured problem-solving activities. The follow-up activities and publications of the Role Guide Series were made possible from grants by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Through a sharing of information, all participants gained knowledge. The information shared in this booklet is intended for use both by experienced individuals and those just entering the field. The booklet can help the experienced individual to become more aware of additional aspects of the role and of directions being taken by others. It can assist the novice in gaining an overview of the role as seen by those who have worked in this capacity. The information also can be used as a means for guiding others in the community to gain a better understanding of the role and its relationship to community education.

AS CITIZENS, WE BELIEVE

We believe that all community citizens have the right to receive the full benefits of all available community resources.

We believe that our needs must be answered with skills that are necessary to survive in a world that is changing constantly and all too often is hostile and unfeeling.

We believe that all community citizens must have K-12 academic experience.

We believe that competencies in: citizenship, environmental and health education, employment preparation and training, social and cultural studies, and parenting must become standard and basic foundations of education for communities.

We believe that members of all role groups must share their skills and expertise through experience and materials with all members of the community.

We believe that there must be no barriers between facility managers and community users.

We believe that all public facilities must be fully and effectively utilized through partnership planning among government and agency representatives and community members.

We believe that community members must become advocates of citizen involvement and participation in order to further the enrichment of their lives.

We believe that all role groups must listen carefully to each other.

We believe that stronger communities will be developed only through community team building that includes all segments of the community.

We believe that the achievement of many of our goals can be facilitated through the community education process.

INTRODUCTION

The booklet contains thoughts and beliefs which are summaries of group discussions and participant interaction sessions of the Citizen Role Group. It is hoped that the information will encourage others to become aware of the tremendous opportunities available to citizens to work within their communities and to help create community partnerships which use all available human and physical resources in a cooperative effort in addressing identified community problems and needs. The booklet also is intended as a tool to present this role group's perspective to other role groups and to serve as a discussion guide for interaction and training.

Although the booklet is directed primarily at citizen involvement in general, it does provide some guidelines for citizens involved in the field of community education. The contributors believed that community education is one of the best processes for promoting active citizen involvement and for developing strong community partnerships among all role groups. The term "Community Education", as used in the following sections is:

> a process where local people, democratically organized, provide leadership to determine the needs of the community; to identify the available resources to meet those needs; and to develop programs, services, and activities to utilize all available resources to meet those needs.

The philosophy of the Citizen Role Group is based on the premise that more people can do more for themselves and their communities. The group participants stress that a good community education program is based on the premise of "Mind over Matter - If no one minds, it does not matter." They urge all community members, regardless of role, to "mind" and to care sincerely if they have a desire for a better quality of life in a strong community. Community members are urged to speak out in support of their beliefs and desires and to realize that in community affairs it does not matter from whence the voice comes so long as it is positive and does not exclude others. Citizens, both as individuals and as a group, are encouraged to take an active role in building strong communities from which all community members can profit and enjoy.

BENEFITS/PROBLEMS

Every community member is a citizen, but not every member actively participates in community affairs. Frequently the ones who are involved are called the "doers" or "backbone" of the community. Why particular individuals are active participants in community life is often a difficult question to answer because each has different values.

The following is a listing of some of the potential benefits to be derived by an active citizen from involvement in a community education program:

- satisfaction from helping to improve the quality of life in the community
- friendships gained as a result of meeting and becoming better acquainted with more community members
- development of understanding for the problems and needs of others
- more security from theft and vandalism because more programs are offered to satisfy the needs of all
- better use of the tax dollar through fuller utilization of public facilities
- more services available to more people
- less duplication of costly services
- lifelong learning opportunities available for all

- community members working together to study and solve community problems
- increased availability of rehabilitation and job retraining programs
- increased availability of space for all types of programs and meetings
- establishment of a central focal point where community members can gather to discuss and solve needs and problems
- development of a strong sense of community and oneness

In many organizational respects, the potential problems of community education are no different from ones which are encountered by other community programs. Most of them can be solved through active involvement of those concerned in a team effort. Among the problems encountered may be:

- arriving at common terminology or language
- creating awareness of the potential benefits to be gained by all
- understanding the concept and/or its implementation plan
- establishing interagency cooperation
- resolving "turf" problems
- convincing all community members that their input is needed and helpful
- planning <u>for</u> the community <u>with</u> the community
- starting and maintaining interaction among <u>all</u> segments of the community

- publicizing the programs to be offered
- securing commitment from those in authority
- securing competent on-going leadership
- securing "seed money" to start the program

Regardless of the community, the opportunities for citizen involvement are many and varied. Through cooperation and teamwork with various role groups within a community, the citizen can attain personal benefits while helping to build strong community partnerships to overcome problems and to create a sense of community for all.

THE ROLE OF CITIZENS ON COUNCILS

Each citizen is a many-faceted individual possessing knowledge, experience, and skills gained from a wide variety of backgrounds. In addition, each is generally a member of several organizations and groups in a community. Recognizing these facts, more role groups have been making more effort to include input from citizens in the various aspects and stages in planning processes. In the public sector, citizen input has proven to be especially valuable in developing programs to provide more effective services available to more people. Although methods of obtaining this input vary according to the type of information sought, citizen councils are frequently the means for securing input on a continuous, on-going basis.

The membership of a citizen council should include the known leaders of the community as well as representatives from minorities, the religious field, the business field, the political arena, the education population (administration, faculty, and student) the retirees, citizens without children or school-age children, the various neighborhoods which comprise the community, individuals needing the services, and members of other community groups. The function of the council is to work for the good of the community; therefore, the input from all segments of the community is needed for effective work to be accomplished.

In addition to securing a representative membership on a citizen council, it has proven wise to develop and adopt a set of by-laws for operation. The by-laws provide for each member of the council, as well as those in the community, an operational basis that is understood by all. The citizen council should be a forum which meets regularly. All meetings should be well publicized

to encourage full attendance and always should be open to the general public. All community groups should be invited and encouraged to send representatives to attend and participate in the meeting. The meeting format should encourage some social interaction in order for persons to become better acquainted and to learn to respect and trust each other.

Characteristics of Citizens on Councils

Regardless of whether citizens are referred to as consumer advocates, the voice of the people, the grass roots population, or other such classifications, it must be remembered that all programs, projects, and services in a community are for and because of the community residents. Therefore, the citizen voice must be heard and heeded if the desired results of any program, project, or service are to be achieved most successfully.

It is recommended strongly that individuals selected as council members have displayed certain characteristics in their daily lives. Citizens generally participate effectively if they exhibit some of the following characteristics:

- vocal advocacy
- knowledge
- the ability to organize
- the ability to relate to others
- resourcefulness
- dependability
- cooperation
- the ability to evaluate

Although one person usually does not possess all of these characteristics to a high degree, needed ones can and will be developed with encouragement, work, study, and training. Indeed, it is urged that the talents of council members be fully developed through training sessions which are discussed in a later section of this booklet.

Responsibility of Citizens on Councils

The responsibilities of citizens on councils are not arduous, but they do require diligent effort and dependability. These responsibilities include:

- caring, being committed, and becoming knowledgeable about the community
- becoming involved enthusiastically with others in a common concern or need
- evaluating objectively the current situation in order to support the positive elements and to advocate change when and where necessary
- promoting an equal partnership between citizens and all community groups delivering human services
- promoting trust, openness, and a willingness to share available resources
- facilitating the understanding, organizing, and using of existing channels and resources to distribute resources efficiently and to resolve problems and meet needs effectively
- keeping citizens informed about council activities
- conveying the concerns of the council to other citizens and groups
- creating a recognizable citizen leadership structure
- participating in the selection, training, and development of the staff of all jointly-based projects and programs.

RELATIONSHIPS TO OTHER ROLE GROUPS

During the group discussions and participant interaction at the Academies several terms kept recurring. They were: communication, constraints, parameters, expectations, feedback and involvement. It became evident to the participants that this list expressed many of the frustrations of a citizen and that these terms needed to be understood before an effective relationship to the other role groups could be established. It was agreed that it is the responsiblity of the citizen to make the initial effort toward coping with these terms and the frustrations surrounding them. It was suggested also that they must take the initiative to activate the members of other role groups if the idea that "it takes all people helping all people before a strong community will arise" is to be put into practice. It was pointed out that when community members initiate the move to establish open communications with all role groups, the constraints and/or parameters of the other roles are learned and understood better. With this knowledge, citizens are better able to establish effective partnerships and to set realistic expectations, to establish means of feedback, and to learn ways to become involved actively and helpfully.

The successful creation of a program that effectively serves the people of a community often depends on the type of process which establishes it. The process of creating effective partnerships involves:

- becoming knowledgeable about the duties and responsibilities of the other role groups.
- learning the administrative structure and patterns of authority.

- seeking opportunities to promote and/or facilitate interaction among various community groups.

- having realistic, practical expectations while maintaining high ideals.

- establishing communications that insure that an answer/feedback is received within a reasonable amount of time.

- being willing to participate in meetings and to accept responsibilities in areas where citizen involvement is necessary and helpful to the community.

One term infrequently mentioned in the deliberations was the word, "money" and/or "funding." The participants avoided the area of cost and concentrated their discussions around agencies' willingness to share, planning programs which involve the citizens/users, cooperative use of facilities, and people's willingness to help each other. Citizens do not deny that money is necessary for problems to be solved and needs to be met. However, they believe that through effective partnerships and full cooperation among all role groups, the needed resources for a program or project can be secured. They advocate that with better planning, fuller cooperation, and more efficient use of facilities and resources, most communities will be able to provide needed services and to achieve a better quality of life for all citizens. The following information is intended to stimulate awareness and to cause the role of the citizen to become better defined. The potential relationship of citizens to each of the role groups represented at the Role Training Academies is examined.

School Board Members

A partnership should be established between the school board and citizens in which the school

board receives needed information about the community and community members facilitate the implementation of policies and mandates in ways appropriate to a particular community.

In order for the partnership to be based on a firm foundation, both the school board members and citizens must accept several responsibilities. School board members must:

- establish a policy which provides for the active participation of community members;
- maintain convenient, open, two-way avenues of communication; and
- provide citizens with accurate, up-to-date information on current situations.

Citizens must accept the responsibilities:

- to learn the facts;
- to map reasonable, practical courses of action;
- to be reasonable and understanding;
- to be willing to compromise;
- to be aware that what will help one segment of the community may hinder another segment; and
- to listen to the guidelines and advice of the superintendent and school board members.

It is recommended that citizens be involved in the selection process of appointed school board members and that they have input into the determination of school board policies which are to be followed by all who deliver human services in the school facilities. Community members should

attend as many school board meetings as possible. Their presence makes it possible for board members to communicate their positions, deliberations, rationales, and concerns to the community and for citizens to have accurate information needed to assesses current situations.

It is not difficult for an individual to become an effective member of the school board-citizens partnership. Community members should remember that although members of the school board are usually citizens, their time is limited and they can become out of touch with changing needs in various segments of the community. Thus, a citizen can aid school board members by:

- becoming acquainted personally with as many board members as possible,
- volunteering to work on advisory councils and/or task forces,
- listening to board members and helping to find solutions,
- keeping board members informed of community activities and concerns,
- providing a variety of perceptions and perspectives to matters being considered by the school board,
- inviting board members to participate in community events in order to become more aware of the total community and the various segments which comprise it, and
- having board members function on citizen councils where possible and appropriate.

Superintendent

In order to establish a good working relationship with the superintendent, the citizen

must recognize that the superintendent functions under mandates from the school board and the state legislative body. It is only through persuasion that the superintendent can add to or modify policies and guidelines to meet more adequately the needs of the community. Even when the superintendent is aware of a need in the community, time is needed for change to occur.

It is recommended that citizens, either individually or through citizen council action, become well acquainted with the superintendent. One method is to keep the superintendent informed of all community programs and problems through written communications and personal visits. He/she should be invited to participate in community events whenever possible because, in addition to serving as chief administrator of the school system, one of his/her main duties is enhancing public relations to increase community support and financial assistance. The superintendent's personal appearance at community events will help increase community members' trust as well as provide him/her with a needed sense of support.

The Principal

The principal is responsible primarily for the day-to-day operation of the public school which must be accomplished according to guidelines from the superintendent and the school board. In this capacity, the principal becomes involved with several groups of citizens - students, parents of students, neighbors of the school including the business community, members of the school's advisory committee/council, and community members who are participants in community education programs and activities housed in the school. In addition, the principal is usually the immediate supervisor of the community school coordinator.

There are many examples throughout the country proving that a principal/citizens partnership has resulted in an outstanding school and a stronger community. This partnership between the principal and citizens can be especially effective

because the principal operates closer to the grass roots of a community than do most other administrators and often he must rely on community support when necessary changes have to be made. In turn, through his administrative position, the principal can help achieve community goals in the most productive way.

It is possible for citizens to work with the principal in several ways. The principal generally has a need for volunteers to help within the school, and concerned citizens should insure that this need is met whenever possible. By working within the school, citizens are able to understand better the problems and contraints under which the principal must operate and, thus, are able to aid in devising means to overcome those areas which affect the community as a whole.

The citizens/principal partnership can function on a broader level. The principal should be invited to attend or to be represented at citizen meetings. During these meetings, community members should be open and should communicate their common concerns and needs. They must recognize that although the principal must adhere to definite rules and regulations, within the limits of his authority, it is possible for him to offer guidance, advice, support, and some resources to help achieve identified goals and a stronger sense of community.

System-wide Community Education Coordinator

Developing a working relationship with the system-wide community education coordinator is especially important to citizens because of the community involvement nature of this staff position. A functioning partnership allows the coordinator:

- to be available to and aware of all segments of the community,
- to establish and maintain open communication with the total community,

- to secure volunteer time and service;
- to be advised on needs, potentials, and resources within the total community; and
- to utilize citizen support and advocacy for needed/desired changes and improvements.

The partnership usually benefits citizens in terms of broader services; more readily accessible and more responsive programs; more meaningful volunteer involvement; increased opportunities to address particular problems and concerns; more representative and responsive advisory boards and councils; and stronger, healthier democratic relationships throughout the community.

Individuals should remember when working with the system-wide coordinator that the coordinator's responsibilities extend to all segments of the community and that the problems and needs of one segment must be put in perspective with the problems and needs of all other segments. However, the problems and needs of one segment often are similar to those of another segment, and the knowledge and experience of the system-wide coordinator, coupled with his awareness of available resources in the total community, can assist in finding solutions.

The Building-Level Community Education Coordinator

The building-level coordinator works between two segments of a community, a particular school and the community members identifying with that school. The job requires that the coordinator have an awareness of the school's policies and practices, of staff and faculty support and restraints, and of community members' needs and problems. Thus, the coordinator must have open lines of communication with both segments if the responsibilities of the job are to fulfilled. In a successful community education program, citizens and the building-level coordinator work cooperatively to determine the programs and activities

which will best serve the community as well as the means to gain the needed support and participation of those who will be involved in or affected by them.

There are several ways to establish a mutually beneficial citizen/building-level coordinator partnership. One way is for the community members to volunteer to become participants in programs and to use their talents and skills in aiding the operation of the total project. Their participation allows them to become involved in program planning and the building-level coordinator to gain the community input and support necessary for the development and operation of successful programs.

Another means of establishing an effective partnership is for one person on the school's advisory council to stay in close touch with the building-level coordinator. If the president of the council does not have this responsibility, a member should be appointed who is able and willing to fill this liaision position. A strong, working relationship between the building-level coordinator and the council helps to insure the maintenance of an effective community education program. The relationship also has proven beneficial in situations where the coordinator is aware of needs and possible solutions but does not have the power or influence to implement a plan of action.

Community College Personnel

Growth in the number of community colleges has made another type of educational agency/citizens partnership possible in many communities across the nation. The development of a working relationship between community members and community college personnel can prove to be especially beneficial to the community because of the resources (people, facilities, and funds) which a community college has at its disposal to utilize in a particular community.

The community college is generally an accessible institution because its rationale for existence involves focusing on a community in order to fulfill educational needs not fulfilled or incompletely fulfilled by other agencies. It often has cooperative agreements with other agencies in the community, and its programs and activities are announced in a community's various media sources. Many community colleges hold an "open house" at designated times of the year to give community members an opportunity to see the facilities, talk to staff and faculty, and inquire about programs.

In order to develop a working relationship with community college personnel, an individual must understand the nature, scope, and function of the institution as prescribed by legislation and as developed by the community college's administration. Because of the community college's local focus and general accessibility, several avenues usually are open for gaining this knowledge:

- contacting members of the community college's board of trustees and the administration,
- serving on advisory committees and counsels to the extension, adult education, and community services divisions of the school,
- joining task forces conducting needs assessments, program planning, and evaluation surveys, and
- participating in program offerings and recruitment of new participants.

The development of a strong community college/citizens partnership benefits the total community. The community college receives increased local support (including financial support), help in determining program needs, increased numbers of program participants, and increased opportunities for interagency cooperation. Community members

receive more responsive, comprehensive programming, increased opportunities for individual participation and self-improvement, and more responsiveness to the changing needs and desires of all citizens.

Government/Agency Representatives

The government/agency representatives group encompasses a wide spectrum of people and abilities. Although they are discussed separately, Cooperative Extension and Park and Recreation personnel are included in this role group. The group is comprised of the staff and personnel of the many decision-making, administrative, and supportive services located or operating in a community. The nature of their position is to regulate and provide other services which aid the welfare and functioning of the community.

Citizens should become acquainted with as many representatives of this role group as possible and try to gain an understanding of the problems and constraints to the performance of each representative's job. Frequently, for individual reasons, these types of jobs are misunderstood by community members, and government and agency personnel meet with suspicion and antagonism.

To aid the establishment of good working relationships, government and agency personnel should seek to create an atmosphere of respect and trust between each role group. The development of a citizen/government and agency partnership benefits the total community. By actively seeking citizen input and support, government and agency personnel are better able to provide higher quality services, gain support to obtain needed resources, design methods to utilize existing resources more efficiently and effectively, increase the number of people served, encourage the coordination of efforts among the various agencies, and determine ways to avoid duplication of services.

Park and Recreation Personnel

Recreation is a profession which deals with an integral part of community life. Citizens can provide valuable support to a community's park and recreation personnel when they are well versed in the philosophy and organization of the recreation agency. It is the responsibility of the park and recreation personnel to promote awareness and understanding of the potential roles and functions of this agency.

The citizen/park and recreation partnership is potentially one of the strongest in a community because of the large number of community members who participate in and/or are affected by the agency's programs. Citizens can strengthen the functioning of this partnership by helping to keep park and recreation personnel abreast of community needs and resources and by being advocates of the park and recreation agency to the various other community groups and the community administration. They also can promote the concept by supporting programs and by volunteering to assist in the planning, organization, and implementation of recreation programs.

Cooperative Extension Agents

Cooperative Extension is part of the Land Grant University System which is a cooperative effort of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and state and local government. Extension agents are present in every county and in many cities in the nation, and they are trained to work with area residents to establish and operate programs and services needed by that particular area. Their mandate for operation entails that they be capable and willing to do many functions which are needed in a community. Because of their skills in the area of community development, they often can serve as catalyst to help communities to help themselves.

The strengths and talents of the Cooperative Extension agents too often are overlooked by many

community members. Citizens, whether urban or rural residents, should establish communication lines with Cooperative Extension agents. The agents are valuable community members whose talents and skills are applicable to many areas including training via workshops, establishing programs and clubs, instructing various types of courses, and facilitating cooperative planning with other community agencies.

Special Populations

The special populations role group includes the physically disabled, mentally disabled, sensory disabled (blind, visually impaired, speech impaired, and hearing impaired), learning disabled, and socially disabled (prison inmates, senile individuals, disruptive youths, and other institutionalized individuals), and the socially or culturally deprived (minority groups and immigrants). It should be stressed that members of this role group are members of the community with needs, concerns, problems, and desires which need to be served and solved just as those of any member of the community need to be served and solved, and that sometimes the needs of this group are more urgent than those of more advantaged members of the community. It should be remembered also that the members of the special populations role group have skills, talents, and abilities which they can contribute to the betterment of the total community.

Most citizens are aware of individuals in the community who are included in the special population group. In fact, the presence of these individuals often is taken for granted to the extent that their special needs and/or facilitative arrangements are forgotten. Because members of the special populations group sometimes are included in community life and sometimes left out, concerned citizens will find this group more difficult to identify than other groups.

Citizens can play an important part in creating a community environment that will encourage

members of the special populations group to become active community members. By being vocal advocates (speaking and writing) it is possible for citizens to make the community-at-large become aware of and understand the needs and talents of this group. Citizens are in a position to encourage other community members to view special populations as active, productive members of the community and to encourage individual members of the special population group to join actively and to be accepted in community life. As an advocate, an individual can help keep members of the special populations group from being isolated or from isolating themselves because of their impairment. It is the responsibility of the citizen to assist in securing the necessary means and special arrangements needed for their inclusion. These necessary means and arrangements include providing transportation, adapting facilities, securing special equipment, interpreting to facilitate communication, and providing involvement opportunities.

TRAINING

In order for citizens to serve as effectively as possible in partnerships with the various role groups, they need to receive appropriate training.

The following activities should be considered and/or included in the curriculum for any citizen participant training:

- assessing needs
- inventorying resources
- developing plans and strategies
- setting goals and priorities
- establishing communication channels
- analyzing problems
- enhancing participation in group interaction processes
- researching for data and fact finding

It is suggested that this training be in the format of workshops led by qualified instructors and facilitators. Often there are members of the community who should be encouraged to be instructors and to share their knowledge and talent. Trained people also may be available through educational institutions, centers for community education, and many community agencies.

Workshops should be held regularly in a central location. No more than 20-30 people should be involved in any one workshop skill-building session. It is recommended that the workshop include an opening session with a keynote address and charge given by someone respected by the participants.

It should be noted that while it is important to have training sessions for those just beginning various involvement activities, it is equally important to update training by focusing on specific areas such as communications, interagency cooperation, programming, etc. Training should be an on-going and planned procedure with citizen council members being encouraged to participate on a regular continuing basis.

THE FUTURE

The contributors to this booklet believe that their efforts and energies and those of others across the nation can accomplish many things. Citizens are optimistic but they are realistic and recognize the amount of effort needed to achieve their goals. The following are some of the goals which their efforts will be directed toward achieving:

- Community education processes which involve all concerned persons.
- Recognition and inclusion of citizens as important contributors in all community-concerned deliberations.
- Public facilities which are fully utilized by all segments of the community.
- Opportunities for all citizens to gain basic competency skills within their immediate communities.
- Awareness by all citizens that they have rights which will be honored.
- Communities in which community groups listen to each other and work together as a team to solve problems and fulfill needs.

- Availability of training for citizen advocates to learn effective methods for evoking positive action.

- Establishment of communication lines and cooperative means to be widely used by all segments and role groups in the community.

Efforts to achieve these and other goals can be guided by the opening creed "As Citizens, We Believe" and the premise of "Mind Over Matter - If no one minds, it does not matter." As citizens, we urge all community members, regardless of role, to "mind" and to care sincerely if they have a desire for a better quality of life in a strong community.

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